2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

x 796
N95
342
361

11. Dressing the *mamma* masks

10. The *zumáciba* medicine shrine in Jebba

Si Walker G-5 (ca. 1933) 1934 FF52 Nupe FF52

8. Then, there are two figures which in appearance seem to be cast out of pure copper. One is 1 foot 10 inches high, and represents a man standing with clasped hands. A small pigtail adorns the head, the eyes are very bulging, and the feet very big. The other (Plate M 6) is a remarkably realistic bit of modelling, and is as noticeable for this quality as No. 4 is for its formal decorative treatment.

9. There remains one small figure (Plate M 7, 8), 1 foot 4 inches high, apparently of pure brass. It is of a male figure of ungainly proportions and coarse features, holding a crook and wearing an apron. In addition, a small cotton cloth is tied round its loins.

10. No. 4 is very heavy, due probably to the fact that the clay core is still within the figure. The others are light and hollow. All are or have at one time been on shallow rectangular bases.

11. The first thing that strikes one about the figures as a whole is the difference in the material of which they are cast. All of them appear to be made by the *cire perdue* process. But, as has been indicated above, four are of dark bronze, two appear to be of pure copper, and one of brass. Only the three last-named are kept scoured. Another striking feature is the divergence of technique. It is impossible to think that there are less than three sources for these figures, not because of the difference in metal used but on account of the wide difference in treatment—unless, of course, they are copies of originals. However this may be, the designs on Plate M 2, 3, 4 are so distinctive and conventionalized that they must have had antecedents, and it is to be hoped that this article may have given sufficient data by which their origin can be traced.

12. The Village Head of Tada tells the following legend. The Chief of Atagara had a son called Shode who was a successful hunter but could not find a market for his meat. At that time the chief of a certain town called Wanta had a girl in his household whom he gave to Shode to cook the meat of the animals he killed. After a time she became with child by Shode. When he was about to return to his home, he brought her a charm and a loin cloth and told her to give them to her son when he was born, for a son it would be. Shortly after he had returned home, his father, the chief of Atagara, died and he succeeded to the chiefdom. Now, in those times when a new chief was installed, each town brought slaves, and it happened that this child Edegi, which the girl bore to Shode, was amongst them on this occasion. When the chief, Shode, saw Edegi, he recognized him by the charm and loin cloth, promoted him to honour and showed him much affection. Shortly before his death he called Edegi and told him that after his death he should gather all his property together and leave the country. At this the townspeople rose up in jealousy, but Edegi escaped and travelled up the Niger with his loaded canoes till he came to the neighbourhood of Bida. There he abandoned chains because of their weight and passed on to Tafa in Bida territory, then to Tada, Gbaré and Jebba, at each of which places he left either chains or ornamental figures. He got as far as Kwatashi in Bussa, and then returned or was driven back. His boat and poles were of bronze. They lie in the Ega river close to Muregi. Edegi sank himself and the boat because he could not elude his enemies. He was the first chief of the Nupé.[1]

13. The information given in this account suggested further inquiry at Gbere, 15 miles east of Jebba, opposite Réba, the only one of the above-mentioned places that is situated in Ilorin Province. Owing to the phenomenal floods it was not possible to reach the village itself, but the chains were brought to Tada for inspection. There are five of them, measuring 33 feet 6 inches, 20 feet, 23 feet, 8 feet 8 inches and 7 feet 2 inches respectively, and all are much corroded. The links vary from 3 inches to 6 inches in length and are rectangular in shape. At the end of one chain is a circular link. The weight of all the chains is about 20 lbs.

14. The Ndeji and the Wangwa of Gbere say that the chains were used in pre-British days for strangling criminals. Executions were carried out in the bush by the Chechе assisted by three youths. The present Chechе who looks after the chains has not seen an execution, but the Ndeji

[1] *Note.*—According to the Bussa legend, Edegi was chief of Gbere. He came up the river as far as Kwatashi, and encamped on the east bank of the Niger. Sarkin Wawa sent to warn him that he was not destined to become ruler of this region and if he stayed death would be his portion. It was then low water, and Edegi walked out to a large rock to receive the Wawa envoys.

When he heard their message he laid a curse upon the rock that any canoe that came near it would sink and any man that touched it would die. Edegi then departed down stream, but the rock remains and is still called Dutsin Edegi.

9: Nadel E-5 (1934-1935) 1935 FF52 Nupe FF52

MAN

A MONTHLY RECORD OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL SCIENCE

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE
ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

XXXV, 143-160 SEPTEMBER, 1935

ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

Africa: West. With Plate I-J. Nadel.

131 **The King's Hangman: a judicial organization in Central Nigeria.** *By Dr. S. F. Nadel.* 143

Travelling on the Niger in Nupe country, between Jebba in the North and Eggā in the South, one comes across a certain group of villages, curiously distinguished from the rest of the riverain villages by the special name which the Nupe have for them: they call them *ledu*, in the plural *leduzhi*, which means, literally, 'prison.'

I.

778 693 [562] The common name stands for a common organization to which they all belong. And as an apt symbol for an organization expressed by such a name each of these villages possesses the same emblem: a sacred iron chain (fig. 2). As a rule this chain is kept in the chief's house, and only very reluctantly would he show it as in fig. 4. At any rate, he would always make sure first that no woman (the anthropologist's wife included) is near the place when he brings it out into the daylight—for no woman is allowed to set eyes on this sacred implement. It is a heavy iron chain, often some 30 feet long, with strong leg- and arm-irons on it—what we should call a typical slave- or prison-chain. It is kept rolled up in a round wooden tray; but in one place, at Jebba, I found a railway wheel serving this purpose. The chain will always smell abominably, and will be covered with flies, the [782] unmistakable sign that the traditional sacrifice of beer, and blood of fowl, has been performed properly.

There exist altogether eight such *ledu* villages. They are distributed along the Niger banks in a surprisingly regular manner, always between 10 to 15 miles apart from one another. The names of the *ledu* villages, from north to south, are as follows: Jebba, Gbere (fig. 1), Tada, Jiragi, Sūlati, [103] Fofo, Tayi, Cewuru. Two *ledu* villages, Jebba and Tada—an offshoot of Jebba—possess, besides the chains, sacred bronze figures (fig. 3) which signify that these two villages are the 'old ones,' the heads [532] of the *ledu* organization. The chain itself is called *ẹgbā Tsoede*—the 'chain of Tsoede'—and chains and figures are said to have been brought to these places by the mythical ancestor of Nupe kingdom, Tsoede.[1]

173 The many versions of the Tsoede tradition which exist in Nupe country differ in details only. The main facts are always the same: Tsoede was a Nupe man, who was sent as slave to the Atta (king) of Idah, at the time when the Nupe were tributary to Idah. From a slave Tsoede soon became the Atta's favourite and friend. Presented by the Atta with slaves, wealth and powerful magic, but envied by the Atta's relatives, he had to flee from Idah after the Atta's death. In a magical bronze canoe, one of the Atta's presents, he paddled up the Niger and finally reached Nupe country. Here he settled down, and amongst the people of his country he distributed his wealth, the insignia of his rulership, and the emblems of his powerful magic. Very soon he delivered Nupe country from

[1] According to Nupe etymology the name Tsoede is derived from *Etsu Ede*, or *'tsu Ede*, *i.e.*, king Ede. This explains the other name by which the culture hero of the Nupe is also known, *Edegi*.

9:Nadel \ E.5 (1934-1935) 1935 FF52 Nupe FF52

133
501
775

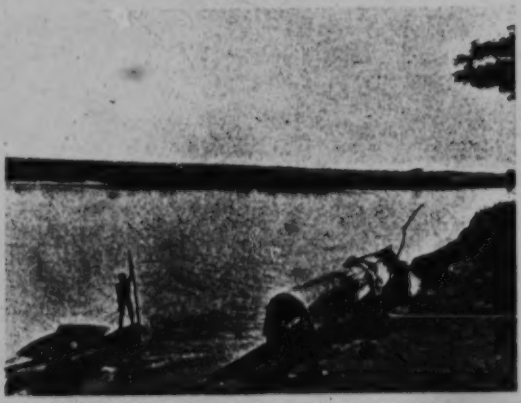

FIG. 1. LANDING-PLACE AT GBEBE, ONE OF THE LEDU VILLAGES.

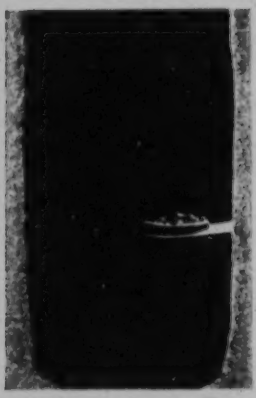

FIG. 2. THE "CHAIN OF TROKIS."

775
941
532
291

FIG. 3. THE SACRED BRONZE FIGURES AT JEBBA.

FIG. 4. VILLAGE CHIEF WITH *kasi* HOODS.

THE KING'S HANGMEN IN CENTRAL NIGERIA.

[Facing page 129]

9:Nadel E-5 (1934-1935) 1935 FF52 Nupe FF52

MAN

A MONTHLY RECORD OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL SCIENCE

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE
ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

XXXV, 143-160 SEPTEMBER, 1935

ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

Africa: West. With Plate I-J. Nadel.

131 **The King's Hangmen: a judicial organization in Central Nigeria.** *By Dr. S. F. Nadel.*

143 Travelling on the Niger in Nupe country, between Jebba in the North and Eggā in the South, one comes across a certain group of villages, curiously distinguished from the rest of the riverain villages by the special name which the Nupe have for them: they call them *ledu*, in the plural *leduzhi*, which means, literally, 'prison.'

I.

●778 693 [562] The common name stands for a common organization to which they all belong. And as an apt symbol for an organization expressed by such a name each of these villages possesses the same emblem: a sacred iron chain (fig. 2). As a rule this chain is kept in the chief's house, and only very reluctantly would he show it as in fig. 4. 'At any rate, he would always make sure first that no woman (the anthropologist's wife included) is near the place when he brings it out into the daylight—for no woman is allowed to set eyes on this sacred implement. It is a heavy iron chain, often some 30 feet long, with strong leg- and arm-irons on it—what we should call a typical slave- or prison-chain. It is kept rolled up in a round wooden tray; but in one place, at Jebba, I found a railway wheel serving this purpose. The chain will always smell abominably, and will be covered with flies, the [782] unmistakable sign that the traditional sacrifice of beer, and blood of fowl, has been performed properly.

There exist altogether eight such *ledu* villages. They are distributed along the Niger banks in a surprisingly regular manner, always between 10 to 15 miles apart from one another. The names of the *ledu* villages, from north to south, are as follows: Jebba, Gbere (fig. 1), Tada, Jiragi, Sūlati, [103] Fofo, Tayi, Cewuru. Two *ledu* villages, Jebba and Tada—an offshoot of Jebba—possess, besides the chains, sacred bronze figures (fig. 3) which signify that these two villages are the 'old ones,' the heads [532] of the *ledu* organization. The chain itself is called *égbā Tsoede*—the 'chain of Tsoede'—and chains and figures are said to have been brought to these places by the mythical ancestor of Nupe kingdom, Tsoede.[1]

173 The many versions of the Tsoede tradition which exist in Nupe country differ in details only. The main facts are always the same: Tsoede was a Nupe man, who was sent as slave to the Atta (king) of Idah, at the time when the Nupe were tributary to Idah. From a slave Tsoede soon became the Atta's favourite and friend. Presented by the Atta with slaves, wealth and powerful magic, but envied by the Atta's relatives, he had to flee from Idah after the Atta's death. In a magical bronze canoe, one of the Atta's presents, he paddled up the Niger and finally reached Nupe country. Here he settled down, and amongst the people of his country he distributed his wealth, the insignia of his rulership, and the emblems of his powerful magic. Very soon he delivered Nupe country from

[1] According to Nupe etymology the name Tsoede is derived from *Etsu Ede*, or *'tsu Ede*, *i.e.*, king Ede. This explains the other name by which the culture hero of the Nupe is also known, *Edegi*.

9:Nadel E-5 (1934-1935) 1935 FF52 Nupe FF52

the supremacy of Idah, and established the independent Nupe kingdom which is eventually to become one of the most powerful native states in Nigeria.[2]

II.

The chain is the sacred relic of all *ledu* villages. It protects the village from sickness, and gives fertility to the women. But it has yet another, more special, meaning. It is also called *'ti dzana*, the 'head of Dzana,' and the story goes that Tsoede inaugurated the chain by beheading his own maternal uncle, Dzana, and placing head and chain together on the wooden tray as a permanent symbol for his power over life and death. From that day the chain remained an instrument of execution, and the villages which possess it are the ones to perform the execution; they are the 'king's hangmen.'[3] The jurisdiction over grave crimes lay in the hands of the king. They were actually termed *leiji nyá 'tsu*, 'crimes of the king.' But whenever such a grave crime was committed, the king had to summon the help of the *ledu*. The criminal was brought to the king's residence first. The king would then try the case, invoke the sacred ordeal, and pass the sentence. Then his own men would bring the criminal to the place of the execution, as a rule the *ledu* village situated nearest to the place of the crime. There men from the village put the criminal in irons, and led him into the bush where nobody could see him, tied the sacred chain round his neck, and strangled him. Finally they buried the corpse in the bush, and returned to their village, announcing to the king's messenger that 'everything had been done.'

The crimes which were regarded as such 'king's crimes' were: theft during the night, and big theft (*e.g.*, of cattle, or a horse); murder; and the crime of *lèse majesté*. In this case the *ledu* did not kill the criminal, but only flogged him severely, and drove him out of the territory of Nupe. In case the criminal was a man of high rank, perhaps of the ruling family, only the head towns, Jebba or Tada, could perform the execution.

Three men were the executioners in every village, and one amongst them was invariably the *ndáce*, the 'father of the shooting,' *i.e.*, the head of the hunter guild. There is a deep meaning in this. For a hunter is not only a man trained in hunting and killing, but he also possesses that essential magic which, after the act of killing, can expiate the deed, and propitiate the spirit of the dead. And through this element of propitiatory magic the killing of the guilty criminal is distinguished from all other killing. It ceases to be mere inflicting of death. It gains the dignity of a sacred office, and an almost ritual act.

Whether such beliefs went deeper than this; whether there existed a general superstition which made the people shrink from the idea of inflicting death on natives of their own village, and thus made them entrust this uncanny work to people from other places, or to people protected by special magic, I dare not decide. There certainly exists still to-day a strong repugnance against having to do with all matters concerning death, and in particular unnatural death. Even the ordinary burial is carried out in secret, by one special family in every village which alone possesses the magical knowledge of burying the dead. But should a person be killed by lightning, or found murdered, no native of the village would come near the dead, but people from another village (or perhaps a village known for its special magic) would be called to perform this mysteriously perilous work. Yet, on the other hand, I have positive evidence that in certain places of Nupe, outside the

[2] A few words only about the possible historical basis of this tradition. According to the existing, very detailed, genealogies of the Nupe kings, Tsoede's life fell into the beginning of the sixteenth century. At that time Idah is said to have been, since long, under the supremacy of Benin. Now the big bronze figures at Jebba and Tada are cast in *cire perdue*, the same technic as the famous Benin bronzes—and a technic which does not exist, at least not in the same perfection, in Nupe country to-day. The chains and irons, finally, are evidently of European origin. They must have been brought into Nigeria by the Portuguese who, as we know, had established close contact, and an extended slave trade, with the king of Benin by the end of the fifteenth century. From Benin the bronze figures and chains might have reached Idah, and eventually Nupe, by the natural highway for trade and traffic, the Niger.—About the bronze figures see also Max, 1931, 261, and 1934, 193.

[3] The *ledu* are also known by the name *dogari nya Tsoede*, lit. the policemen of Tsoede. *Dogari*, however, is a Hausa word, which might have been adopted more recently. In one or two places I actually found an older term still remembered: *tsie-cigbeci*, lit. the executioner-medicineman. This term evidently refers to the magical element connected with this office.